



**The Norman Knight Nursing Center
for Clinical & Professional Development**

PCAs Quick Reference: Care of Patients at Risk for Suicide and Self Harm

What is a suicide attempt? The CDC defines it as “self-directed injurious behavior with intent to die as a result.”

Background

Suicide is the 4th leading cause of death among adults. A suicide occurs every 28 minutes. It is the #1 cause of injury mortality (exceeds motor vehicle accidents). Massachusetts has seen a 35% increase since 1999. 84% of those individuals who commit suicide will have received health care in the previous year. **Suicide is preventable** through treatment of patients identified at risk.

What do you need to know? Risk Factors

- Psychiatric disorders
- Previous suicide attempts
- History of trauma or loss
- Serious illness/physical impairment
- Chronic pain
- Substance use disorder
- Social isolation
- Aggressive or anti-social behavior
- Recent discharge from inpatient psychiatric care
- Access to lethal means coupled with suicidal thoughts/plans/intent
- 90% of suicides suffer from untreated, undiagnosed behavioral health disorders

What is the role of the PCA (under the direction of the RN)?

- Red flags: Patient talks about wanting to die, Patient has a plan in place to die and patient has the means to carry out the plan
- Nurses and doctors will have screen the patient for suicide risk and developed a plan for creating a safe environment. This includes:
 - Security will be present for a belongings search
 - Patient will wear snap clothing
 - Off the floor diagnostic tests will be deferred until patient is off suicide precautions
 - Environmental sweep must be done at least once per shift checking for anything that might be a means for self-harm, room kept free of clutter
 - Visitors will have items for patient checked, visitors are informed of restrictions
 - Patient will have paper tray, number of plasticware is counted coming in and going out
 - No cans, straws, metal utensils or breakable dishes/glasses
- You may be asked to be the patient observer
 - You will support the above interventions
 - You must receive a full report prior to beginning this role, have set breaks, never leave patient alone, report any significant changes